

**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
PORTER SQUARE DESIGN PROJECT
MEETING NOTES**

Subject: Porter Square Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) – 1/30/03 Meeting

Date, Time & Place: January 30, 2003, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM
North Cambridge Senior Center

Present:

CAC Members:

Doug Berman, Al Gowan, John Howard, George McCray, Dave Reed, Jane Sauer, Elaine Savorino, Si Sahpiro

City of Cambridge:

Susanne Rasmussen

(CDD)

Jeff Parenti (TP&T)

Bill Deignan (CDD)

*CDD = Community Development
Department*

*TP&T = Traffic, Parking and
Transportation Department
CAC = Cambridge Arts Council*

Consultant Team:

Jerry Friedman (Earth Tech, Inc.)

1. INTRODUCTION AND PUBLIC MEETING UPDATE (Susanne Rasmussen / Bill Deignan)

Susanne welcomed the attendees, introduced the City staff and Consultants present, and reviewed the agenda for the evening (see attached).

At tonight's meeting we'd like to follow up on many issues discussed at the last meeting and review the preliminary design in preparation for a public meeting on February 26th. Some changes to plans are being suggested and we'd like to review those as well as get an update from meetings with the City's pedestrian and bicycle committees as well as the North Cambridge Stabilization committee. We would also like to discuss presentation material for the meeting.

2. SCHEDULE UPDATE

As everyone knows, the construction of this project will happen along with utility work. We have just received a revised schedule from the DPW's consultants that indicates that their design work will not be done until late 2003 with construction beginning in early 2004 – a delay of 4-6 months. The consultants did not start work in time under the contract to measure pipe flows to conduct hydraulic modeling. The impact to the surface design schedule will be minimal – we've got good momentum going now, and we will continue on schedule. We are not aware of any impacts to funding at this point. There may, in fact, not be much overall impact on the construction schedule – the utility work will be able to proceed during the winter months.

3. PUBLIC PROCESS UPDATE (Bill Deignan)

Meetings were held with the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Committees to discuss the overall project as well as the bike left turn with a technical subcommittee of the Bicycle Committee. A meeting was also held with the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee.

Bicycle Committee

Overall like the committee liked the plan and appreciated the new facilities for cyclists and pedestrians. The Committee continues to look at ways to get cyclists to ride in the left side of the bike lanes, away from doors and we'll continue to work with them on the design details of this. Also, the committee briefly discussed by bike left turn but left that issue to a subsequent meeting of a technical subcommittee.

The subcommittee came to near consensus on a treatment of the bike left that they thought was simple and in line with what cyclists would actually do. This involves creating a narrow space at the side of the road near the West Headhouse to wait and have bikes cross when pedestrians cross.

Pedestrian Committee

The committee strongly endorsed the plan. They particularly liked the new crossings (w/ countdown signals) and the exclusive pedestrian phases in the signal timing. There was a concern about illegal lefts to Somerville Ave from the shopping center and the design details of the plaza. The concern is that this be attractive and useable and not become another unused space in the Square.

There were also questions about newsboxes. It looks like the City will have the ability to keep newsboxes out of the new Plaza space, especially if changes to the newsbox ordinance are made. We will keep an eye on this. Additional suggestions were made about adding bus shelters in busy locations, and lighting at crosswalks. The committee felt that it was preferable to create legal, marked crosswalks instead of relying on the median for illegal crossings, especially when it meant including a bike lane to encourage bikes to be on the road and not on sidewalks. The committee did suggest adding an additional crossing near Allen that we would like to discuss further tonight.

North Cambridge Stabilization Committee

Overall the group liked many of the changes including many of the new crosswalks at the intersection and many liked the left turn. There's concern that with removal of the median in the Allen/Davenport block, crossings will be more difficult. Also, concern with the precedent this might set for the North Mass Ave. project in the future. The City assured the committee that this was not the case – that the City is committed to an independent public process and examination of median issues on North Mass. Ave. should that project be reopened.

In addition, there was a concern about the safety of bicycle lanes and car doors opening, an issue which the bicycle committee is responding to. Several Porter Square Advisory Committee members were there to talk about the rationale about balancing different needs, specifically the desire to create legal, predictable crossings along with space for bikes as opposed to keeping the median where pedestrian jaywalk and cross less predictably. Someone also suggested adding a crossing at Allen Street and a few others were supportive of the median.

Many who attended were concerned about changes to turns at Porter Road based on a misreading of the plans – no changes are planned there. Also, the suggestion was made to

narrow the sidewalk and fit in the bike lane and median. We looked at this suggestion and don't feel that it would work based on dimensions, but also that reducing sidewalks in a busy place like Porter Square was not a way to make it a better place to walk and get to the MBTA. There is a pinch point in front of the Masonic Hall where a very small sidewalk would be left if a reduction were made there. There are also issues about how to transition this change back into the rest of the street and the cost associated with moving this much curb and changes to drainage.

4. STREET OPERATIONS / PLAN REVISIONS (Bill Deignan / Jerry Friedman)

We've been discussing a number of issues from our last meeting as well as based on suggestions from neighborhood meetings.

Left turn from White Street

The feasibility of allowing a left turn out of White Street was examined again. We have concluded that there is simply insufficient time in the signal cycle to make this operate adequately, without adversely affecting the other gains that have been made in pedestrian crossing time, left-turn from the Shopping Center, etc.

Bicycle Left-Turn onto Somerville Ave

As mentioned earlier, we looked at this issue with the bike technical subcommittee. Given the constraints on available signal time, the subcommittee felt that instead of having a bicycle signal and two bicycle lanes, cyclists should wait near the West Headhouse pedestrian crossing and cross with the pedestrian indication. We are still reviewing the time needed to get across and through Somerville Ave. crosswalks. We are looking to create a small (1.5'-2') space alongside the curb for cyclist to wait out of the through bicycle lane. There was a suggestion to place bollards or something to make it less attractive to cars to pull off and make drop offs.

Bus Stops

We propose to slightly shift the new West Headhouse stop in the main intersection to make room for the bike waiting space just mentioned.

We are proposing to move the Davenport stop to the south side of the street at a curb extension, alongside a taxi stand w/ three spaces. Since the bus stop will be on a curb extension, we don't think it will be attractive for illegal short-term parking. Three new parking spaces can be created at the old bus stop north of Davenport Street. The new stop would be a combined stop for the 77, 83, and 96 buses.

Pedestrian Crossings

Based on the comments we have received, we looked again at crossings to see if an additional one could be done with fewer impacts. We heard the desire to cross from the Post Office area to the Cambridge Savings Bank, so we looked again at a crossing near Allen St. and squeezed dimensions of travel lanes to the extent possible.

We found that a crossing from the south side of Allen directly serves the desire line; does not pose a conflict from vehicles turning out of Allen St.; and does not create new traffic moves or prevent existing moves. There would be a total loss of four parking spaces, and with the three new spaces at Davenport Street, the net loss in this block would be one (and three overall in the Project Area).

Signal Phasing with Upland Road

The signal phasing plan (see attached) has been updated to integrate the Upland Road moves. Some of the details are still in discussion with the City's Traffic Department, but changes should be minor.

Other Outstanding Issues

Trees

DPW is looking at existing trees, grates and tree supports to see if its worth keeping existing ones. If we don't add them to new trees, there could be maintenance problems, but these devices are not always best for long-term health of tree.

Lighting

City's Electrical Dept is looking at lighting issues along with the consultants to determine if lighting is needed at places other than the new plaza, such as Davenport Street. Also, do the existing poles need to be painted?

Sidewalk materials

We don't need a final decision now but would like to discuss the issue. We plan to replace the square paving tiles that are in the City's right-of-way and rebuild many parts of the sidewalk. For accessibility and ease of walking, the City prefers to use a standard concrete sidewalk. Along major streets, the City sometimes uses a brick edge against the curb as a special treatment.

CAC Comments and Discussion (City/Consultant Responses in Italics)

- Understand and accept the lack of left turn from White Street, but seems like concerns of Agassiz neighborhood are being traded against concerns of Mossland Street.
- Wrong-way biking is a problem on White Street.
- Can bus stop and taxi stand be switched? (*Not physically feasible*).
- Like Allen St. crosswalk – now have crosswalk at every block.
- Parking is important – what will businesses say about losing parking for Allen crosswalk?
- Reconsider allowing parking on Allen Street. Also, are handicap spaces ever actually used?
- In Davis Square, all the additional crosswalks have really calmed the traffic.
- Concern about the Beech Street pedestrian timing and pushbutton operation.
- Would be useful to see pictures of different types of sidewalk materials.

5. PLAZA DESIGN (Bill Deignan / Cynthia Smith)

The plaza design has not changed much since the Committee agreed at the last meeting on a general concept. We have more information now on the grading requirements. A ramp will be necessary to make up a change in grade from the sidewalk to plaza. We discussed shifting the point at the back of the Plaza at which pedestrians would be physically able to enter into the Parking Lot. The design is looking at siting bicycle racks and reworking the small plaza based on comments. We didn't want to get too far ahead on the design until the selected artist is working on their piece so that the work can be collaborative.

Art Subcommittee Report: Hafthor Yngvason and Al Gowan:

A jury of 3 selected from among 3 artists who made a presentation about what their work is like. They were not asked to provide specific proposals for Porter Square. The selected artist, Toshihiro Katayama, is from Japan, and lives in Arlington. He is presently affiliated with

Harvard University, and due to his daily commute, he is very familiar with Porter Square. His past work shows sensitivity to small Plaza projects and we are excited about working with him.

6. PUBLIC MEETING (Bill Deignan / Susanne Rasmussen)

We are still looking to have the meeting on February 26th. Lesley University has offered us a large classroom that should hold 75-100 people. The Masonic Hall also has their auditorium available on the 27th which conflicts with the City's regularly scheduled Pedestrian Advisory Committee Meeting. The Masonic Hall also has a wheel chair lift which is not ideal. We will let you know as soon as space is confirmed.

We would like to have one or more volunteers to give an introduction at the public meeting on your perspective of the project. (Doug Berman, David Reed volunteered)

Graphics – We plan to have full graphics of the plan
Colored versions of the plans
Colored perspective of the new intersection / plaza
Signal timing – on boards
Handouts – goals, list of new facilities, 11x17 plans
Any other ideas for us to consider?

CAC Comments and Discussion

- Consider doing a very graphic presentation with side-by-side before and after photos and renderings, etc.

7. PUBLIC COMMENT (City/Consultant response in italics)

- Concern that at left-turn lane, last car that doesn't make it out will block the crosswalk.
- Bike parking at roadway level is better than at Plaza level – will discourage bike riding across Plaza
- Need more bike parking overall.
- Will median be cut-through for ease of walking at unsignalized crossings? (Yes)
- Beech Street curb extensions are good. Would like to consider making Beech Street pedestrian phase automatic, not push-button.
- Can crossing at Upland Road be diagonal?
- Allen Street x-walk a good idea.
- Concerned that bike lanes are not safe, and should not be installed at expense of median safety strip. Bike lanes were dropped from Hampshire Street because they were not working.
- Need to complete a safety study. Why do bike lanes make people safer? Need specific data.
- Concern that people won't walk to the new crosswalks. Need actual counts of where people use the median today.
- Belmont uses stanchions in the road to enforce crosswalks – consider that here. North Cambridge Stabilization Committee has asked for them.
- There have been recent accidents at crosswalks on Huron Ave and Walden Street.
- Consider porous Plaza paving materials – helps trees live longer.

- Sidewalk at Post Office is 20' wide; at Christopher's only 10' wide; at Masonic Hall 17' wide. Consider reducing Post Office sidewalk so median can be retained.
- Glad to see bus stop moved to south side of Davenport.
- Both bus stops need amenities (seating, shelters, lighting)